

RE: Senate Bills 1029, 1030, 1076, 1077, 1078

Dear Senate Judiciary Committee.

My name is Lew Kidder. I am retired lawyer, an ex-prosecuting attorney (Lake County, Michigan), and founder of a national magazine covering the sport of triathlon. Much of my life, however, has been spent creating athletic events and coaching women who wanted to reach their potential in endurance sports. I live at 1768 Kestrel Way, Ann Arbor, MI 48103.

I was married to Karen McKeachie for almost 31 years. Karen was an extraordinary human being and an extraordinary athlete. She lettered in three sports as an undergraduate at both MSU and U of M and continued to compete at a very high level for the rest of her life. The sport of triathlon became her focus, and she went on to win 17 national titles and 7 world titles in the sport. In 2014, she was inducted into the USA Triathlon Hall of Fame, one of only ten women to be so honored to date.

On August 26, 2016, at 10:45 a.m., Karen was on a training ride with two other women; one of them – Nicole Minier – is with me today. They were headed east on Dexter-Chelsea Road, a typical two-lane paved road in western Washtenaw County.. Two miles or so east of the city of Chelsea, a car approached them heading west, closely followed by a pick-up truck. Suddenly the truck pulled into the east-bound lane to pass the car. The three women had but a couple of seconds to react. Miraculously, two of them escaped; Karen did not. She was hit head-on by the truck and died instantly.

In the aftermath of the accident, the driver of the truck observed at the scene that “It was a passing lane. I had the right-of-way”, and “I didn’t hit her – she hit me”. His ignorance of the law was almost as stunning as the consequences were devastating, but it serves as yet another graphic example of the old philosophical conundrum: If a tree falls in a forest and no one or thing is within hearing range, did it really make a sound?”

My point? Getting the traffic laws right is an absolute necessity - but it is hardly sufficient. Drivers have to KNOW about these laws – and that’s where the system broke down for Karen. Two of our friends have 15 and 16-year-old kids who are taking drivers education right now – and the kids tell us that they are getting little or no information about laws pertaining to the interaction between drivers and bicycles. Kids who don’t know grow up to be adults who don’t know. We need to change this dynamic.

Widespread knowledge is something that is absolutely critical to the goal we all seek – making it safer for bicyclists to co-exist with the motoring world. That is something on which the legislature can, and should, take action. I would recommend:

1. Make bicyclist-motor vehicle law and practice a significant and required part of driver education.
2. Require an applicant to demonstrate significant knowledge of this field of law and practice before granting an initial driver’s license
3. Require periodic retesting of a driver’s knowledge of this field of law and practice. Once every six years should be about right. If the driver can’t pass the test, do not renew the license until he/she can.